



Stephanie Rawlings-Blake
Mayor

PLANNING COMMISSION

Wilbur E. "Bill" Cunningham, Chairman



Thomas J. Stosur
Director

STAFF REPORT

April 15, 2010

REQUEST: Minor Amendment and Final Design/New East Baltimore Community PUD – Graduate Student High Rise (Parcel R9/R10)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Minor Amendment: Approval
- Final Design: Approval

STAFF: Natasha Becker

PETITIONER(S): 929 North Wolfe Street, LLC

OWNERS: Same

SITE/GENERAL AREA

Site Conditions: Development parcels R9 and R10 of the New East Baltimore Community Planned Unit Development (PUD) correspond to the lot at the northeast corner of Ashland Avenue and North Wolfe Streets. The site is directly across the street from a large proposed park, to be known as Ashland Commons, and the first Life Sciences building, already completed and occupied.

General Area: The current phase of development lies within the proposed Phase I Planned Unit Development (PUD) area of the greater New East Baltimore Community. The proposed PUD area is bounded by East Chase Street to the north, East Madison Street to the south, and roughly by North Washington Street to the east and North Broadway to the west. The total site area is 33.98 acres; all zoned either B-2-3 or R-8.

The general project area lies at the convergence of several distinct neighborhoods that are also Urban Renewal Areas in the central portion of East Baltimore. Those are the Middle East, Johnston Square, Broadway East, Oliver, and Gay Street I Urban Renewal Areas. Though predominantly Residential (either R-7 or R-8), there are also smaller areas of Office-Residential, Commercial, and Industrial zoning. With the exception of Johnston Square, all of the neighborhoods or portions thereof, are in the Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition (HEBCAC) Village Center of the Eastside Empowerment Zone. Institutional and public facilities in the area include several elementary schools, Broadway Court Elderly Housing, the John Hopkins Drug Treatment Facility, One Stop Career Center, East Baltimore Medical Center, and Collington Square and Oliver Recreation Centers.

CONFORMITY TO PLANS

The project is located within the Middle East Urban Renewal Plan area. The proposed development plan is in conformance with the goals and objectives of that plan. It is also in line with the New East Baltimore Community Planned Unit Development, which serves as a Master plan for the area. Moreover, the proposal is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Baltimore City Comprehensive Master Plan, specifically: LIVE Goal 1, Objective 1: Expand Housing Choice for all Residents.

HISTORY

- Ordinance #1202, approved November 30, 1979, established the Middle East Urban Renewal Plan.
- On August 12, 2004, the Planning Commission recommended approval of various street and alley closings within the New East Baltimore Community (Part I).
- On June 2, 2005, members of the Planning Commission granted Final Design Approval to the first Life Sciences building to be constructed at 855 N. Wolfe Street.
- Ordinance #05-124, approved by the Mayor and City Council on September 26, 2005, was the last amendment to the Middle East Urban Renewal Plan.
- Ordinance #05-159, approved by the Mayor and City Council on October 26, 2005, rezoned multiple properties in the project area from the B-2-3 zoning district to the R-8 zoning district.
- Ordinance #05-160, approved by the Mayor and City Council on October 26, 2005, established the New East Baltimore Community Planned Unit Development.
- On December 1, 2005, the Planning Commission recommended approval of various street and alley closings within the New East Baltimore Community (Part II.)
- On March 23, 2006, the Planning Commission approved the Final Subdivision and Development Plan for the R2 and R3 residential buildings.
- On August 10, 2006, the Planning Commission approved the Final Design for a temporary surface parking lot adjacent to the R2 and R3 residential buildings.
- On August 9, 2007, the Planning Commission approved a Minor Amendment for the primary residential area north of Eager Street and a Final Design Approval for the R1 development parcels.
- On December 20, 2007, the Planning Commission approved the Final Subdivision and Development Plan for the residential area north of Eager Street
- On April 3, 2008, the Planning Commission approved the Final Design for multiple blocks comprising Pennrose's Phase I area.

ANALYSIS

This project is part of the New East Baltimore Community Planned Unit Development (PUD). Specifically, the plan is to construct a mixed-use residential building with ground floor retail at the northeast corner of Ashland Avenue and North Wolfe Street. The residential component is to serve John Hopkins graduate students and their families. There will be a total of 324 apartment units, ranging from efficiencies to four bedroom units. The site was recently subdivided to create the parcel on which the building will sit, to be known as 929 North Wolfe Street.

As part of its review of the request, staff has considered the following:

PUD Compliance: 929 North Wolfe Street corresponds to development parcels R9 and R10 of the PUD, which have been slated for residential development. So the proposal is in conformance with the PUD's development plan program. Additionally, there are height controls in the PUD that limit Parcel R9 to a height of 200' and parcel R10 to a height of 100'. Though the building has been designed as one cohesive whole, it does respect these varying height limits. The portion of the building closest to Ashland Avenue has been designed as a 20-story tower, while the portion on the north end drops down in height to eight stories. A minor amendment to the PUD is needed simply to reflect the fact that the building's footprint has changed slightly since the time it was depicted on the original PUD development plan. It was originally planned that a garage structure would actually connect to the building, whereas now it will be separated by an alley. Additionally, all new construction in a PUD requires Planning Commission Final Design Approval, which entails review of the site plan, architectural building elevations (including signage), and landscape plan.

Site Plan: The project was reviewed and approved by members of the Site Plan Review Committee on September 17, 2009. Required parking will eventually be provided in an adjacent parking garage, separated from the building by a service alley that will provide loading and unloading, as well as dumpster areas. In the immediate term, required parking will be provided on an already existing surface parking lot. That lot was originally constructed to serve the office users of the first Life Sciences building, located at 855 North Wolfe Street. But as there is a separate lease agreement with Johns Hopkins University to lease space in a nearby garage, there is an overage in the amount of parking provided on the surface lot. As such, the graduate student high rise will utilize this area to fulfill its parking requirements until such time as the garage is constructed. The off-site parking agreement between 855 North Wolfe Street, LLC and John Hopkins University must be approved by the Zoning Administrator in order to proceed. Otherwise, occupancy permits may not be issued for the building.

Architecture: The project obtained final approval from the Urban Design and Architectural Review Panel on February 25, 2010. The building will be a mixture of brick and metal panel, with a trellis at the roof level of the 8-story building component. The building's main entrance will be along North Wolfe Street, across from the proposed Ashland Commons. Proposed retail along the Wolfe and Ashland frontages will have separate entrances and canopy awnings.

Signage: There will be two types of signage on the building: building entry signage and individual tenant signage. The entry signage will be limited to application on the canopy and window glazing as shown on elevations. This signage will be used at both the main and alley entrances. Retail tenant signage will include the following: signage within the metal band area above each canopy, signage on the non-sloped area of the canopies themselves, vertical blade signs which will project from the building, and storefront window glazing. The horizontal metal band area above the canopies may contain logos either backlit or lit by down lights from above. All canopies are to be the same shape and extension over the street. Blade signs may be lit logos or banners. Storefront signage is limited to interior or exterior window glazing and cannot include any hung banners.

Landscaping: A landscape plan has been provided as part of the submittal package. Street trees and a variety of shrubs will be planted along North Wolfe Street, Ashland Avenue, and along the building's alley perimeter.

In advance of a hearing on this matter, staff notified the following community groups: Northeast Market Merchants Association, Reclaiming our Community, Citizens Communication Coalition, Broadway Development Foundation, Madison East End Neighborhood Improvement Association, Madison East End Improvement Association, Inc., Monument Street Merchants Association, Monument Street Renaissance, Milton-Montford Improvement Association, Inc., Faith Lane Community Association, Washington-Wolfe Gateway Community Association, McElderry Park Community Association, C.A.R.E., Save Middle East Action Committee, and Historic East Baltimore Community Action Coalition, Inc.

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